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This Week's Forums: Page 35

EDUCATION WEEK

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'Literacy' Urged For All Students On Agriculture

Study Says the F.F.A. Fosters Wrong 'Image'

By Reagan Walker

WASHINGTON—The nation needs to shore up its knowledge base in agriculture by creating better, more "contemporary" vocational courses and exposing all students, beginning in kindergarten, to some kind of systematic instruction in the field.

That is the conclusion reached by the National Research Council in a three-year study whose findings were released here last week.

The study found that students' knowledge of the scientific, economic, and environmental forces that determine the supply of food is alarmingly low.

Contending that "agriculture is too important a topic to be taught only to the relatively small percentage of students considering careers in [it] and pursuing vocational-agriculture studies," it urges school officials to seek innovative ways of making "agricultural literacy" a part of the regular curriculum.

The report was written by a committee of experts convened by the N.R.C.—an arm of the National Academy of Sciences—at the urging of federal agencies.

The document also suggests ways of opening up the vocational component of agricultural education to a broader spectrum of students, particularly minority and urban youths.

One of those ways is implicit in its criticism of the 435,000-member Future Farmers of America, which it says may inadvertently "lessen for many students the

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Reform at 5: The Unfinished Agenda

States and the 'At Risk' Issues: Said Aware but Still 'Failing'

By Tom Mirga

WASHINGTON—Although all states have demonstrated some awareness of the problems of children at risk for school failure, only 14 have taken the first steps toward a comprehensive approach to solving them, a new survey concludes.

"A level of improvements unacceptably low and a dropout rate for minorities perilously high seems to us to describe what we have seen with regard to service for at-risk youth in the American public schools," write the authors of the study, which was released here last week.

"We could not give the states of this nation a passing grade for what has been done for youth at risk up to now," they continue. "We would have to hand out an F.

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Study says states' response to demography has been inadequate.

Despite Years of Rhetoric, Most Still See Little Understanding, Inadequate Efforts

By Lynn Olson

The release of several national studies last week highlighted what many now consider the most pressing concern facing American education: the growing number of students "at risk" of leaving school prior to graduation or without the skills needed to get a job.

But after more than three years of national reports and public soul-searching, educators said last week, services for these youngsters have barely begun to mirror the magnitude of the problem.

"I just don't believe people are serious about this," said Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

"We had more stirring about the fact that there was pollution on the beaches this summer than that children's lives are being destroyed in city schools," he contended, because the former "touched the comfort of the middle class."

Real progress in helping at-risk students succeed remains painfully slow, according to many educators, despite the

Continued on Page 16

Child-Care Bill's Odds for Passage Said Diminishing

Some Groups Clashing On Church-State Issue

By Deborah L. Gold

WASHINGTON—A debate that has been simmering for several months over a major child-care bill pending in the Congress erupted into a clash last week among some members of a broad-based coalition of groups that have been backing the measure.

Sharp divisions between some education and children's advocacy groups surfaced as press reports indicated that unresolved issues may thwart consideration of the measure this session.

At the crux of the debate is what role the federal government should play in supporting child-care services based in religious institutions.

In view of estimates that religious institutions provide at least a third of the nation's child care, resolution of that issue is considered a critical factor in the success of the $2.5-billion "act for better child-care services."

The bill, backed by an alliance of 130 national organizations, was introduced last year and approved by House and Senate ed-

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Election '88

Bush Said Weighing A New 'Family Act'

By Julie A. Miller

WASHINGTON—A group of Republican lawmakers plans to introduce a package of legislative proposals dubbed the "American Family Act" that Congressional sources say could become a fixture of Vice President George Bush's Presidential campaign.

The package includes new grant programs to aid school districts experimenting with school-based management, open enrollment, and character education.

Some proposals in the "Family Act" have already been introduced as legislation, and the others are to be introduced this week.

Mark Souder, minority staff director for the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, said he and his staff have worked with the Bush campaign on

Continued on Page 23

Pension Portability: New Focus on Why 'You Can't Take It With You'

By Nancy Mathis

After being a back-burner issue for decades, pension portability—the idea that teachers who switch jobs from one state to another should not have their retirement benefits penalized—may be edging its way to the forefront of policymakers' agendas.

Supporters of pension portability say the issue will become increasingly critical as states try to cope with future teacher shortages, and teachers themselves demand greater professional status.

The National Governors' Association, which already is on record in support of pension portability, is preparing to issue a report examining existing state policies and the barriers they pose to teacher mobility.

The Common Market, an organization linking six New England states and New York, also has portability on its list of study items, as state school chiefs within the coalition seek to increase interstate cooperation.

And a provision in a tax measure currently pending before the Congress would provide some degree of flexibilty for teachers by allowing them to place their withdrawn pension funds in an account similar to the Individual Retirement Account.

"It is an issue that has been around for a long time, but is just now gaining the attention of public-policy leaders that it needs and deserves," said Michael Edwards, Congressional relations manager for the National Education Association.

Currently, no state allows teachers to withdraw both their contribution and the state contribution to the pension fund when departing from the system.

Teachers also are penalized, critics con-

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California Textbooks Delayed
In a setback for State Superintendent Bill Honig, the California Board of Education has postponed a decision on adopting a controversial new textbook plan. **Page 12.**

The Politics of Research
A new Congressional study argues that the Education Department's research arm is overly politicized and calls for creation of a bipartisan board to set policy for the agency. **Page 22.**

Looking at 'STARS'
Democratic Presidential candidate Michael S. Dukakis's call for a new system of college-loan repayments has drawn a mostly positive reaction from higher-education groups. **Page 23.**

Stressing Sexual Abstinence
New Presidential directives call for an emphasis on abstinence in sex-education programs and efforts to prevent school clinics from issuing contraceptives without parental consent. **Page 26.**

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ACROSS THE NATION

NATIONAL

Report Notes Both Gains, Declines In Support for the Humanities

Although American society has made "great progress" in appreciating and understanding literature, history, and culture, the study of the humanities in colleges and universities has declined, according to a new report issued by Lynne V. Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Congressionally mandated report argued that recent increases in attendance at museums and cultural events, in book purchases, and in participation in literary discussions show that "increasing numbers of Americans are learning, are gaining the insights that the humanities offer."

However, "it is not possible to make such a positive assessment when one looks at our colleges and universities," the report added.

Enrollment in humanities courses has suffered "dramatic" declines in the past two decades, and many institutions have contributed to that decline by failing to require humanities instruction, the report said. It also depicted the academic study of the humanities as being increasingly directed toward small groups of scholars.

To reverse those trends, the report called on colleges and universities to work toward "intellectually coherent curricula" and to reward researchers who publish works of "general significance."

Single copies of the report, "Humanities in America," are available free of charge from the Office of Publications and Public Affairs, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20506.

Coalition Urges the Next President To Lead Nati[illegible]racy Efforts

The next Pre[illegible] efforts to curb adult illiter[illegible]ing the issue and providing [illegible] state, local, and private literacy e[illegible]rts, a coalition of reading and literacy groups contends.

"Only Presidential leadership can ensure that the basic literacy needs of Americans are met," the working group on adult literacy said in its proposed "national adult-literacy policy."

The group recommended that the President inform the nation of the "literacy crisis" in his State of the Union Message; create a Cabinet council on adult literacy; propose the creation of a "national institute for adult literacy"; and double federal funding for adult education.

Recent efforts by state and local governments and the private sector, the group noted, have raised public awareness of the issue and have boosted the resources available for dealing with it. But "these efforts fall far short of the needs" of the more than 23 million Americans who lack basic literacy skills, the group argued.

The coalition includes representatives from the Adult Literacy and Technology Project; the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education; the American Library Association; the Association of State Literacy Directors; the Correctional Education Association; the Council of State Adult Education Directors; the International Reading Association; Laubach Literacy Action; Literacy Volunteers of America; the State Literacy Initiatives Network; and the Urban Literacy Network.

STATES

Tough Conflict-of-Interest Rule Adopted by North Carolina Board

Reports that textbook publishers elaborately entertained top-ranking state education officials have spurred the North Carolina Board of Education to adopt a tough conflict-of-interest policy.

The board acted Sept. 8 to bar its own members, the state superintendent, 1,000 education-agency employees, and members of the state textbook commission and all agency advisory commissions from accepting anything of value from companies that do business with the state.

The new policy, adopted for an initial 90-day trial period, carries no penalties, however.

The Raleigh News and Observer reported recently that textbook publishers have played host to various education officials and have paid thousands of dollars in honoraria to State Superintendent A. Craig Phillips. Officials have denied any improprieties.

■ **Ten Maine schools have received state funding to "break the time barrier"** by experimenting with flexible schedules and interdisciplinary study projects that do not fit within the traditional 45-minute class period.

By allowing students and teachers to design their own cross-disciplinary projects, which can be worked on for several hours at a time rather than in regular class periods, schools can "fix what kids are expected to know and have time be the variable instead of the other way around," said Deputy Commissioner of Education Richard H. Card.

The plans have received enthusiastic support from teachers, administrators, and students, who are working together to study and evaluate different possibilities, Mr. Card said.

■ **California education officials are investigating about 20 schools that allegedly cheated on statewide tests.**

The officials will expunge the scores of any guilty schools from statewide averages and bar them from statewide or national competitions. But local districts will be responsible for any disciplinary actions against teachers or administrators.

In the past year, state officials have taken several steps—for example, requiring proctors in every room in which tests are given—to "lessen the temptation" for cheating, according to a spokesman for the department of education.

The Long, Hot Weekend

Maintenance workers at a St. Petersburg, Fla., high school thought the long Labor Day weekend would be the perfect time to try out a new tactic in their perennial battle against mold and mildew.

The air-conditioning system in Lakewood Senior High School clearly was not up to the task of removing mold-inducing moisture from the city's humid air. So the workers decided instead to try jacking up the heating over the weekend, in hopes of drying out the air in the building and killing the mold.

Events, to put it kindly, did not unfold exactly as planned.

Actually, most of the mold did die as a result of the heat. With temperatures in the building reaching 130 degrees, though, so did all the plants, snakes, rodents, tropical fish, and other animals in the school's laboratories.

When students and teachers returned to school on Tuesday morning, they were greeted by stifling heat, buckled floors, and a distressing quantity of dead things.

The school's video tapes were also victimized by the heat, but computers in the building weathered the high temperature, reports Lakewood's principal, Barbara Broughton.

Lael Barr

Although teachers and students were dismayed by the loss of animals and materials, Ms. Broughton says, members of the community have come to their aid. "People wanted to be helpful and have replaced, through donations, just about all the animals and plants," she reports.

No sooner had Lakewood overcome one disaster, however, when another one struck. Four days of heavy rain led to flooding, forcing workers to spend the week after Labor Day "sandbagging the back of the building, which was covered in water up to the ankles," says a weary Ms. Broughton. —J.W.

Study Compares Teacher Salaries in 10 Nations

By Blake Rodman

A recent federal study that sought to compare the salary levels of elementary- and high-school educators in 10 "advanced" countries contains both good and bad news for American teachers.

The good news, according to the study, is that teachers in the United States, on average, are paid as well as or better than their counterparts in most other major industrial countries.

Of the countries studied, only Canada pays its teachers substantially more on average than American teachers.

But that bright picture changes dramatically, the study found, when teachers' average pay is examined in relation to a widely used measure of countries' domestic economic activity.

When the study compared teachers' salaries with the per capita gross domestic product of their respective countries, it found that American teachers fared less well than those in eight of the other nations.

"While absolute levels of teacher pay in the U.S. are high compared with levels of pay in other countries," the 68-page report states, "relative pay levels appear low, at least in relation to" per capita gross domestic product—a valuation of goods and services that excludes income from abroad.

"It appears that teachers in the United States are able to claim smaller shares of national income and output than are teachers in other advanced countries," the report says.

The study, "International Comparisons of Teachers' Salaries: An Exploratory Study," was conducted by Steven M. Barro of SMB Economic Research Inc. for the National Center for Education Statistics, the data-gathering arm of the U.S. Education Department.

It presents and compares teacher-salary data for Britain, Canada, Denmark, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea, Sweden, the United States, and West Germany. *(See tables on next page.)*

Mr. Barro tried to gather data for the 1983-84 school year, but accepted and included data for the most recent year for which they were available.

The average salaries cited in the report were converted to equivalent U.S. dollars using established "purchasing-power-parity" exchange rates.

Data-Gathering Difficulties

Mr. Barro emphasizes the "exploratory" nature of his research.

Much of the report focuses on the difficulties he encountered in his effort to gather salary information and come up with valid comparisons for the diverse countries studied.

There are large variations among the countries in the "completeness, quality, and reliability of the information" available, Mr. Barro notes.

Moreover, he says, differences in systems of education, in the age and training of teaching forces, and in teacher workloads "raise doubts about data comparability."

"Pending further work on these problems," he states in the report, "the salary comparisons presented here should be treated as preliminary, tentative, and illustrative rather than definitive."

He adds, however, that his findings "do help to place the salaries of U.S. teachers in an international context."

Many recent critics of American education have asserted that teachers in other countries are better qualified and enjoy a higher social and economic status than their counterparts in the United States. Such assertions have made U.S. educators and policymakers increasingly receptive to lessons from abroad.

Although the study was not a policy analysis, Mr. Barro said it was motivated in part by a belief that cross-country comparisons of teachers' salaries would "respond to interests of U.S. policymakers."

"International comparisons," he wrote, "have the potential to contribute to U.S. policy debates by illuminating the relationships between teacher supply and teacher quality, on one hand, and teacher compensation, on the other."

He stressed, however, that his study was not designed to address such broad issues.

Salary and Seniority

With the data he was able to collect, Mr. Barro also attempted to analyze the relationship between salary and teacher experience in the countries studied.

He found that teachers "universally" are paid according to salary schedules that explicitly reward seniority, but that the number of years for which they continue to earn pay increments for their years of experience varies greatly between countries.

For example, teachers in the United States, Britain, and New Zealand generally stop receiving seniority-based raises after 10 to 15 years of experience, while their counterparts in Japan and Korea receive such raises throughout their careers.

Salary scales in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany, the study found, "top out" at 20, 27, and 28 years, respectively.

Mr. Barro also calculated the differences in pay between the least- and most-senior teachers on these scales, taking into account only seniority-related pay variations.

Denmark and Sweden had the lowest ratio of maximum to minimum salary, 1.3 to 1. Japan had the highest, 3 to 1, followed by South Korea, with 2.4 to 1.

The United States fell into the middle of the range in this comparison. The average pay for the most-senior American teachers with bachelor's degrees, Mr. Barro found, is about 1.65 times that of the least senior; for teachers with graduate degrees, the ratio is 1.73 to 1.

Copies of the report may be obtained free of charge from the Education Information Branch, U.S. Education Department, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Room 300, Washington, D.C. 20208-5641.

AN EDUCATOR'S OPINION

To Tomorrow's Leaders

I'd like to address myself to some very special people—to America's future leaders.

No, I'm not writing to Michael Dukakis. Nor to George Bush. I'm writing to America's high school students, to the young people who will guide our nation through the 21st century. And I want to speak to them directly.

First, on behalf of NEA's 1.9 million members—Welcome to a new school year! Welcome back to homework, deadlines, exams, and—yes—to teachers who, like me, accept *no excuses* for efforts that fail to reflect your full potential.

Mary Hatwood Futrell
President, NEA

The challenges before you are—to borrow your lingo—awesome. To take your rightful place in the political and economic life of our republic, you will have to be more self-disciplined and more mentally agile than any previous generations of Americans.

We're doing our best to move you in that direction. That's why, during this school year, you're likely to feel—more directly than before—the impact of the reform movement that is changing the shape of American education. You might find, for example, that your school day is no longer divided into 50-minute chunks, or that rote exercises have been replaced by projects demanding greater creativity.

As you adjust to these changes, I urge you to remember that you are preparing yourselves, not for the day of graduation but for a lifetime of learning.

That's a message I think you need to take to heart. The time is long past when we could view education as a neatly defined process that begins at age 5 or 6 and comes to a grinding halt at 18 or 22. What you are learning today and tomorrow should prepare you to continue learning throughout your life.

By taking aim at that goal, you can become true partners in efforts that are enhancing America's tradition of educational excellence. This partnership already includes teachers, parents, school administrators, the business community, legislators, and other concerned citizens throughout our nation. But without you, that partnership is incomplete.

So join us. Join us by giving education your best shot. Every hour, every day, the entire year.

We—all of us who will soon welcome you as our peers—are on your side. For we know that you, the high school students of today, are the guardians of America's tomorrows.

We expect a lot from you. You, in turn, have a right to expect a lot from us. Together, let us do what is necessary to make sure that the America *your* children grow up in is an America that is strong and generous and just, an America forged by you, by the world's best educated citizenry.

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International Comparisons of Teacher Salaries

Country and Currency Unit	Level of Education	Year	Average Salary: National Currency	Average Salary: U.S. Dollar Equivalent (P.P.P.[1] Rate)	Comparison With U.S. Average in Same Year
United States (dollar)	Elementary	1984	21,452	21,452	1.00
	Secondary	1984	22,667	22,667	1.00
	Combined	1984	22,019	22,019	1.00
Canada (dollar)	Elementary	1984	33,583	28,364	1.32 e
	Secondary	1984	37,836	31,956	1.41 s
	Combined	1984	35,126	29,667	1.35 c
United Kingdom (pound)	Primary	1984	9,158	16,959	0.79 e
	Secondary	1984	9,575	17,731	0.78 s
	Combined	1984	9,401	17,409	0.79 c
West Germany (mark)	Primary	1982	44,540	19,026	1.01 e
	Secondary	1982	50,756	21,681	1.09 s
Netherlands (guilder)	Primary	1982	39,718	16,856	0.90 e
	Secondary	1982	60,061	25,493	1.28 s
Sweden (crown)	Junior	1984	108,504	15,759	0.73 e
	Intermediate	1984	110,892	16,106	0.75 e
	Upper & Gymnasium	1984	129,456	18,803	0.83 s
Denmark (kroner)	Primary & Lower Secondary	1982	151,200	17,709	0.94 e
	Upper Secondary	1982	217,700	25,498	1.28 s
Japan (1,000 yen)	Elementary & Lower Secondary	1984	4,577	20,359	0.95 e
	Upper Secondary	1984	5,037	22,406	0.99 s
	Combined	1984	4,695	20,884	0.95 c
South Korea (1,000 won)	Primary	1984	5,650	14,947	0.70 e
	Middle	1984	5,230	13,836	0.64 e
	Senior High School	1984	5,650	14,947	0.66 s
New Zealand (dollar)	Primary	1986	27,560	16,212[2]	0.65[3]
	Secondary	1986	34,650	20,382[2]	0.78[3]

NOTE: The letters e, s, and c in the last column indicate that the base of the comparison is the U.S. salary paid to elementary teachers, secondary teachers, or elementary and secondary teachers combined.

[1] Purchasing-power parity.
[2] P.P.P. rate not available for New Zealand. Conversion is at a market rate of 1.7 N.Z. dollars per U.S. dollar.
[3] New Zealand salaries for primary and secondary teachers in 1986 are compared with the estimated average U.S. salaries of $24,782 and $26,080 for elementary and secondary teachers, respectively, as reported in the 1985-86 edition of the National Education Agency's Estimates of School Statistics.

Average Teacher Salaries Relative to Per Capita Gross Domestic Product

Country and Currency Unit	Level of Education	Year	Average Teacher Salary	Per Capita Gross Domestic Product	Ratio: Teacher Salary To Per Capita G.D.P.
United States (dollar)	Elementary	1984	21,452	15,707	1.37
	Secondary	1984	22,667	—	1.44
	Combined	1984	22,019	—	1.40
Canada (dollar)	Elementary	1984	33,583	17,641	1.90
	Secondary	1984	37,836	—	2.14
	Combined	1984	35,126	—	1.99
United Kingdom (pound)	Primary	1984	9,158	5,669	1.62
	Secondary	1984	9,575	—	1.69
	Combined	1984	9,401	—	1.66
West Germany (mark)	Primary	1982	44,540	25,923	1.72
	Secondary	1982	50,756	—	1.96
Netherlands (guilder)	Primary	1982	39,718	25,776	1.54
	Secondary	1982	60,061	—	2.33
Sweden (crown)	Junior	1984	108,504	94,674	1.15
	Intermediate	1984	110,892	—	1.17
	Upper Secondary	1984	129,456	—	1.37
Denmark (kroner)	Primary & Lower Secondary	1982	151,200	90,717	1.67
	Upper Secondary	1982	217,700	—	2.40
Japan (1,000 yen)	Elementary & Lower Secondary	1984	4,577	2,482	1.84
	Upper Secondary	1984	5,037	—	2.03
	Combined	1984	4,695	—	1.89
South Korea (1,000 won)	Primary	1984	5,650	1,700	3.32
	Middle	1984	5,230	—	3.08
	Senior High School	1984	5,650	—	3.32
New Zealand (dollar)	Primary	1986	27,560	13,617	2.02
	Secondary	1986	34,650	—	2.54

SOURCE: "International Comparisons of Teachers' Salaries: An Exploratory Study," National Center for Education Statistics.

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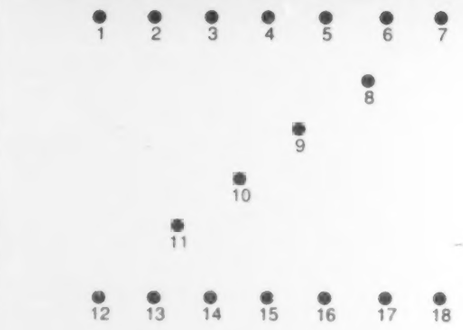

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